Course of negative symptoms in first episode subjects on aripiprazole vs other antipsychotics during a two years follow-up

D. Bergé [1, 2], A. Mané [1,2], P. Salgado [1], P. Garnier [1], LM. Martín [1], A. Merino [1], A. Bulbena [1]
[1] Institut de Neuropsiquiatria i Addiccions (INAD)-Parc de Salut Mar. [2] Grup de Recerca en Neuroimatge – Fundació IMIM (GREEN-FIMIM)

Introduction

Negative symptoms are characteristics of schizophrenia and are present since first episode. Patients who exhibit significant negative symptoms have particularly poor functioning and quality of life (1,2). Despite the attention these symptoms receive, they continue to be a major challenge (3).
Several lines of evidence indicate that early intervention with appropriate pharmacological treatment can contribute to improve the course and outcome of the illness (4).
Aripiprazole is an atypical antipsychotic that appears to be well tolerated and it has a low propensity for causing extrapyramidal symptoms which can cause secondary negative symptoms (5). Furthermore, an improvement in negative symptoms profile with the addition of aripiprazole to clozapine in schizophrenia patients has been described (6).
The present prospective naturalistic study sets out to investigate changes in overall functionallity, total symptomatology and, more specifically, negative symptomatology with aripiprazole and other second generation antipsychotics (SGA) in first-episode psychosis patients during two-years of follow-up period.

Methods

Subjects with a first episode of psychosis were assessed and followed according to the first episode program of the centre (INAD). From the total sample of 130 recruited first episode subjects, 42 subjects completed the two years follow-up*. During the follow up period, patients were clinically assessed using PANSS scale (amongst others). Antipsychotic treatment was prescribed by specialised psychiatrists and modified according to clinical criteria and was recorded at 2 months, 6 months and every year.
In this naturalistic study we studied the association of antipsychotic treatment (aripiprazole vs other SGA) at 2nd year of the follow up period and change in negative symptoms during the follow-up period by means of a two sample t-test.

Results

Socio-demographic characteristics are presented in table 1. No significant between group differences were found. Table 2 shows the most prescribed antipsychotics at the moment of the 2nd year of the follow-up period. Patients on aripiprazole at 2nd year in comparison to the beginning of the follow-up period (two months after the first episode onset) had a significant higher decrease of negative symptoms. Moreover, these patients also had higher scores of negative symptoms at the beginning of the follow-up period. There were no other significant differences in changes in positive symptoms or general functioning between groups (table 3 and figure 1).

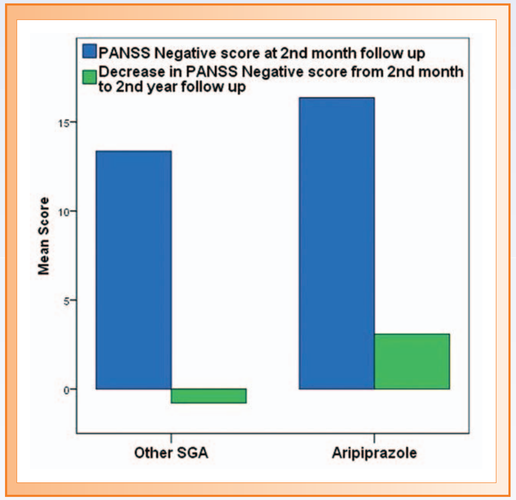

Figure 1: Scores of PANSS Negative at baseline and decrease in PANSS Negative between 2nd month follow up and 2nd year.

Table 1: Baseline socio-demographic characteristics of patients on aripiprazole or other second generation antipsychotics at 2nd year follow-up.

	Aripiprazole 11	Other SGA 19	p
Age; mean years (SD)	24.25 (5.2)	25.05 (5.5)	NS
Cannabis; cig/week (SD)	1.7 (2.4)	9.7 (31.2)	NS
DUP; days (SD)	81.83 (103.4)	99.45 (107.8)	NS
Gender; % Males	66.7%	65%	NS
Duration of first admission; days (SD)	19.08 (9.1)	22.60 (14.2)	NS

Table 2: Prescription of antipsychotics at 2nd year follow-up period.

	N (% total) (% APS*)	Mean dose (SD) mg/day
ARIPIPRAZOLE	12 (28.6%) (37.5%)	15.6 (12.6)
OLANZAPINE	7 (16.7%) (21.9%)	10.4 (7.3)
RISPERIDONE	6 (14.3%) (18.8%)	4.9 (4.5)
CLOZAPINE	4 (9.5%) (12.5%)	262.5 (154.8)
ZIPRASIDONE	1 (2.4%) (3.1%)	80
PALIPERIDONE	1 (2.4%) (3.1%)	9
AMISULPIRIDE	1(2.4%) (3.1%)	100
None	10 (23.8%) (-)	-

* % APS means % of prescriptions amongst patients on antipsychotics

Table 3: Changes in positive and negative symptoms and global functioning in first-episode psychosis patients on aripiprazole vs other SGA* at 2nd year of the follow-up period.

n	Aripiprazole 11	Other SGA* 19	T-test	p
PANSS Negative				
At 2nd month after onset	16.36 (4.5)	13.37 (4.0)	-1.869	0.072
Decrease in two years	3.09 (4.0)	-0.79 (5.3)	2.113	**0.044**
PANSS Positive				
At 2nd month after onset	10.33 (2.8)	12.63 (4.0)	1.719	0.96
Decrease in two years	-0.33 (5.7)	1.84 (5.5)	-1.058	299
PANSS Total				
At 2nd month after onset	55.36 (9.7)	53.89 (9.3)	-0.693	0.494
Decrease in two years	3.55 (13.9)	2.00 (17.0)	0.255	0.801
GAF				
At 2nd month after onset	54.70 (13.0)	53.21 (10.6)	-0.309	0.760
Decrease in two years	-13.20 (21.0)	-11.07 (23.8)	-0.227	0.823

* Second Generation Antipsychotics: Olanzapine 7, Risperidone 5, Clozapine 4, Amisulpiride 1, Paliperidone 1, Ziprasidone 1

Conclusions

Aripiprazole seems to improve negative symptoms more than other second generation antipsychotics without significant risk of increasing positive symptoms or worsening functioning. Important limitations of this study include that patients were not randomly assigned and that aripiprazole seems to be chosen by psychiatrists for those patients showing more negative symptoms.

References

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**** Four patients included in another multicentre study were excluded.***

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IMIM Institut de Recerca Hospital del Mar — Parc de Salut MAR Barcelona
INAD Institut de Neuropsiquiatria i Addiccions — Parc de Salut MAR Barcelona